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FLARR Pages #7: Culture and Society through the Media: an Innovative Approach to Intermediate German

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- Culture & Language
- Society & Language
- Media Use
- Intermediate Level
- German Popular Culture

"Culture and Society through the
Media: An Innovative Approach to
Intermediate German"

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The intermediate year of language study is crucial. Not only is it a bridge to advanced study, but at the college level it includes a varied group of learners from understandably different introductory backgrounds. Most agree, it presents the greatest challenge for appropriate text selection and application! The emphasis on "real" input is valid and in an effort to develop an appealing intermediate course, we identified the following requirements: We wanted something that would 1) be authentic and yet at a realistic level for the intermediate learner, 2) appeal to the learning style of today's students, 3) stimulate discussion, 4) offer insights into contemporary German culture, 5) be adaptable to the inclusion of computer and web resources, 6) enable inclusion of grammar, while not making it a focus, and 7) BE ENJOYABLE!

We decided on experimenting with a periodical and chose *BUNTE*. The intermediate students in our department are requested to purchase the Wells *Handbuch zur deutschen Grammatik*. The 211 students are asked to purchase two small supplemental texts and a 15 week subscription to *Bunte*.

The next step was determining theme units, which we would follow in the magazine and augment through other media sources. The thematic units we decided on were: 1) Germany, a Montage 2) The German States 3) City life/Country Life 4) Home and Responsibilities 5) Family and Friends 6) Relationships 7) Occupations and Work 8) Food and Drink 9) Health, and, 10) Travel and Leisure.

At the beginning of the course, the students are assigned the project of developing a **portfolio** with entries in all of the categories as they relate to an identity they have assumed. They choose a name, a family constellation, a city to live in, an occupation, and design a home, etcetera. We then build and enrich each unit through a variety of other media sources, including other periodicals, films and videos, Deutsche Welle, the Web, music, software and newspapers.

The unit on *Relationships*, as an example, was developed around an interview in Bunte with the currently very popular group **TicTacToe**. A CD of their music was introduced with the lyrics to some of the pertinent songs. Poetry from a variety of literary periods was used. The Grönemeyer song **Männer** was added. In the unit on the Home and Responsibility, students were asked to work with the *Gartenplaner* and *Wohnungsplaner* software. Their plans are then included in their **portfolio**. Travel and leisure is an especially rich unit with the *Georoute* Software and endless Web support.

The selection and order of the grammatical considerations are determined by the instructor and relate to the particular material and theme selected. Since in the **TicTacToe** interview, they talked about their childhood, it was an excellent opportunity to introduce the subordinating conjunctions *als*, *wenn* and *wann*. A weekly *Lehrplan* is developed and distributed, which announces the specific vocabulary, content, and grammar themes that will be followed; however, flexibility in a course like this is necessary to accommodate student discussion and special interest.

Student progress and mastery is assessed through tests & quizzes, oral participation, a weekly journal (where they are asked to choose three articles in the current magazine and react to them), and their end project, the portfolio. They are encouraged to submit

suggestions before the final draft is graded.

The challenges to the instructor are the timetable for preparation, creating a sense of continuity, maintaining flexibility and creativity, keeping current, finding the “meat” and avoiding stereotyping and invalid generalizations. The advantages, however, meet and often exceed our expectations. The topics are always colorful, actual and interesting. The units are adaptable to the inclusion of a variety of enrichment sources and provide for a variety of subject matter. Perhaps most importantly, German 211, where emphasis is placed on spoken communication, has proven to be a positive gateway to German 212, where reading comprehension is stressed. The first story in our current 212 text takes place in a street cafe, where a young woman spends her daily noon hours. The insight the continuing students bring to the reading of that story, and the ability to supply the cultural context and comfortably discuss their insights and understanding of the text, allows them to appreciate the literature on an advanced level.

The obvious advantage of choosing a periodical, is that the text never becomes outdated! The lesson plans don't become stale and the class sessions are different every day. It has been an exciting stimulus for intermediate German, along with being an excellent vehicle for inclusion of emerging technology.